# THE FRENCH ROMANTIC DRAMA AND ITS RELATIONS WITH ENGLISH LITERATURE[1]

## I

## THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE FRENCH CLASSICAL AND THE SHAKESPEARIAN DRAMA

IN the days which preceded the Entente Cordiale, the relations between France and England, as is well known, were on the whole anything but cordial. For generations, almost for centuries, the two nations had stood "hand on hilt" in the words of Kipling, and "ready to strike first". Few were the subjects on which they could agree, and if by chance they were of one mind, and happened to think that a certain thing was good in itself and its acquisition desirable, they soon were ready to go to war about it.

Their very pastimes failed to provide a ground for mutual toleration and understanding. The drama itself became the subject of endless controversy. This can easily be understood. Each nation had early in its history achieved a supremacy of its own in the field of dramatic literature. By the end of the sixteenth century England had Shakespeare; early in the seventeenth century France had the first of her three great dramatists, Corneille, Racine, Molière, who were soon to place the French stage in a position of

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undisputed authority on the continent. Not only was each of the two nations unwilling to surrender its supremacy, but neither could imagine why the dramatists of the other nation should be entitled to any celebrity. This again is no mystery. A drama, in order to become national, must reflect some of the traits of the nation to which it belongs.

Now in the matter of national traits and temperament one can hardly find two nations more different than the French and the English. There is supposed to be, between the two, what Hazlitt calls a "natural antipathy"; an antipathy which has to be overcome by education and personal contact. "The English are a heavy people and the most like a stone of all others. The French are a lively people and more like a feather. They are easily moved and for slight causes. . . . The English if they are moved at all (which is a work of time and difficulty) are moved altogether and the impression if it takes root strikes deep and spreads wide. . . ."

The French, in the eyes of the English at large, being a light, frivolous and superficial people, cannot have a real drama. What French audiences expect, at most, in a tragedy, is not passion but sentimental gallantry. The British, as seen by their French neighbors, do not want art in a drama, but coarse and brutal scenes, fit for the unruly and primitive audiences of the sixteenth century. The British dramatist has to bring in all sorts of elements, physical, natural and supernatural to rouse his stolid spectators. John Bull needs a drama which will grip his heart, daze his imagination and make him suffer physically if he is to be moved at all mentally.

Thus, on each side of the Channel those who were not acquainted with the drama of their neighbors tried to imagine it from what they knew of the temper of the same

neighbor, while those more fortunate who were a little more familiar with it, judged it by standards already firmly implanted in their minds by their own dramatists. The British blamed the French for not writing Shakespearian plays; the French could not forgive Shakespeare for not reaching the standard of perfection of their classical dramatists.

No wonder then that it took the two nations almost two hundred years to reconcile, and then only temporarily, their views on the drama. The general characteristics of the Shakespearian drama are generally well known. Those of the French classical drama are not quite so familiar. These French classical tragedies, after all, are far-off things; some were written nearly three hundred years ago, and they often deal with people who lived two or three thousand years ago. And then, we have our modern tragedies. These can be followed without any effort and without special training. We can read them every morning in our daily papers. They are discussed, not in learned literary societies, but in courts where they are followed with a great deal of interest, and, finally, they are in keeping with our age. "Melpomene, the muse of tragedy," as an American critic has it, "no longer wields the dagger and the poisoned bowl, but the carving knife and the kitchen poker", and this is what most of us enjoy.

Another reason for the lack of popularity of the classical drama is that it runs counter to the tendencies of the modern stage. A French classical drama is primarily a mental drama with little or no stage decoration and almost no physical action. It is a drama written for the mind and not for the eye, while the activities of the eye to-day keep encroaching more and more on those of the mind.

On the other hand, it is difficult for us to conceive a drama which conveys no message of any sort and seems

indifferent to the outer world and its problems. A classical drama is essentially a work of art, conceived and executed by an artist who has nothing to teach, nothing to gain, and yet who puts his whole soul into his work and spares no pains to make it as nearly perfect as it can be. The classical dramatist reminds us of the artist who, with loving care and infinite pains, puts the finishing touch to a beautiful statue or a rich painting, never noticing the people about him, never thinking of success or money, but intent on one thing only: following the vision of his mind and trying to reproduce it in the marble or on the canvas. The French tragedy may be the presentation of some tragic passion, sorrow or despair, which took place two or three thousand years ago, but then, so well chosen, so profoundly human, that it will appeal to men and women at any time and anywhere, regardless of nationality, race or creed, provided they are able to feel and can be moved by the trials and sorrows of their fellowmen. These sorrows or passions are often taken from famous men and women of antiquity, well known figures of the past already celebrated in verse or drama, because thus they are more impressive and also because a sort of literary and artistic flavor already hangs about their names.

A French classical drama, even when it borrows its subjects and characters from the past, is not an historical romance or drama. The French dramatist never loses sight of his immediate purpose. If he wants to depict a passion he depicts that passion and nothing else. All the material details, the paraphernalia which Shakespeare and our romanticists love to bring in, din of the battle, pomp and show of courts, gorgeous scenes of the past, poetical descriptions of nature, are carefully left out. Even in the portrayal of a passion, the French dramatist knows how to

limit himself. He generally takes a moment or an episode in that passion, either the beginning when it reveals itself or the climax when it strikes, or even the end when it yields to other sentiments. That is why the plot of a classical drama looks so remarkably simple and even bare, to foreign observers. It is so simple that it is generally dominated by one central figure on whose decision or gesture everything depends.

The case of *Britannicus,* one of Racine's plays, is characteristic of the method followed by our dramatists. Most historians and novelists who have dealt with the life of Nero, from Tacitus to Renan and Sienkiewicz have tried to retrace the series of his crimes, culminating in the burning of Rome. Not so with Racine. He represents just one episode in the life of Nero, his first passion followed by his first crime. One evening, through a whim, Nero has had the fiancée of his stepbrother Britannicus taken to the imperial palace. He has seen her in the light of the torches, pale, in tears, weak and frail among his warriors. Her misery and her beauty have impressed him, and he falls in love with her. The next day, however, he yields to the entreaties of his mother, agrees to reconcile himself with Britannicus, who used to be the legitimate heir to the Empire, and to return his fiancée to him. Soon after, the reconciliation takes place. Nero offers his brother the cup of friendship, Britannicus drinks and falls dead. Nero had had the cup poisoned, and the courtiers stand aghast, not daring to move, trying to compose their attitude on that of the Emperor, and the play ends on the words of Nero's governor as he leaves the palace: "Would to God that this might be the last of his crimes!"

In the best classical dramas, every word, every gesture, every move tends to one end, which in the present case is

the self-revelation of a monster. This unity of action is the first and the most essential characteristic of a classical drama. It is so sound that it has never been questioned even by the most bitter opponents of classicism. As if to strengthen this impression of unity, the classical dramatist takes great care to have all the incidents of his play happen in the same place; this may be a camp, a palace, a city, but never would one find thirteen changes of scene in a classical drama, as in the famous third act of *Antony and Cleopatra* of Shakespeare.

And, always in keeping with the same idea, all the incidents in the play are supposed to take place within twenty-four hours. These three requisites, unity of action, unity of place, and unity of time, which no classical dramatist can ever neglect, are often called the rule of the three unities, or the three unities, or even the Aristotelian rules. Most of the time Shakespeare ignores them, but every French classical dramatist has to bear them in mind, and if he fails to follow one of them, he humbly apologizes and tries to find some excuse for it.

These rules were not altogether unjustified, and to understand them we have only to remember the mistakes of the dramatists who preceded Corneille and Racine. In the early days of the French drama and even in the days of Corneille, the stage used to be divided into sections. In one of these sections heaven, with its trees and flowers and angels, might be placed, and in the next, not below, but adjacent, one generally found another locality equally well-known, with an appropriate setting of chains and flames and demons.

The amount of setting and decoration piled up on the stage was sufficient in itself to occupy the attention of the spectators. Here, for example, are stage directions given by one of the best predecessors of Corneille, for one of his

plays: "We will need in the middle of the stage a beautiful palace and on one side of it, a sea with a ship with many masts, and on that ship a woman throwing herself into the sea (a fit background for a tragedy, in fact a tragedy in itself) and on the other side we must have a beautiful bedroom with a bed nicely arranged and with sheets." And as an example of the way in which dramatists made free with time, recall another play of this period, namely, *The Strength of the Blood,* in which, between the first and fourth scenes of the first act, the lapse of time is only twenty minutes; while in that same twenty minutes an infant, precocious indeed, attains the age of seven years.

Such mistakes destroy all illusion, and spectators find it impossible that such things as the play presents should ever have happened, or could ever happen. Shakespeare of course, in the eyes of classicists, is just as bad if not worse when, for instance in the *Winter's Tale,* he brings Father Time in person on the stage to explain what happened in the sixteen years which have elapsed since the play began. Such things for a classicist are utter impossibilities and the ruin of a drama.

There is also in a French classical drama another kind of unity which is never discussed, and seldom mentioned, because it goes without saying: the unity of tone. A tragedy is a tragedy and no comical element is ever allowed to enter it. The tone of a tragedy must be noble, dignified; it is the tone of a refined seventeenth century society, both worldly and intellectual, and of excellent literary training. The French classical drama, as has rightly been remarked, "is the representation of passion, sorrow, indignation, and despair, within the rules of decency, honor, and good breeding."

In a classical drama there is no trace of bad taste, vulgarity, much less of license. The language is generally

simple, natural, and in keeping with the occasion, never strained or bombastic and with no forced wit or elaborate metaphors. In fact it seems too bare and insipid to foreign observers, though it was not so in the eyes of classicists like Steele and Addison. "Why, there is not a single sentence in this play that I do not know the meaning of", exclaimed Sir Roger de Coverley, when he was taken to one of the plays of Racine; adding also, with less naïveté than one might think: "Should your people in tragedy always talk to be understood?"

A French dramatist is little concerned about what he considers the superficial side in the presentation of a drama. He would never call like Shakespeare for "a kingdom for a stage! and Princes for actors!" He would merely say "give me a human heart throbbing with life and passion, I will probe it for you. Give me any corner on any stage, and I will show you that there are in this world things infinitely sad, infinitely touching, some appalling in their horror." For, simplicity of action and a natural tone in the expression are no signs of weakness, as may be seen from any of our best classical dramas; the *Andromaque* of Racine, for example. *Andromaque* is the story of an unhappy widow struggling to remain true to the memory of her husband and to protect her child, a situation which may arise, and in fact arises, every day. There was at the court of Louis XIV such a widow, Henriette Marie de France, the widow of Charles I. Racine no doubt thought of her when writing his play, but without making her the heroine of his drama. The subject is so simple, so profoundly human that he felt perfectly free to illustrate it in whichever way he pleased. As a scholar well trained in the humanities, he looked into the past for the best possible illustration. There had been at the court of a famous con-

queror Pyrrhus, an equally famous widow, whose touching faithfulness to the memory of her husband had already been celebrated by a great Latin poet, Virgil, in his *Æneid.* Pyrrhus, the conqueror of the Trojans, had fallen in love with his captive Andromaque, though he was already married to a Greek princess, Hermione. The intense jealousy of Hermione had been the subject of one of the most powerful plays of a Greek dramatist, Euripides. Racine himself, then twenty-six, had had some trying experiences of his own, so that when he wrote his drama he combined these experiences with the grace and nobility of the Latin poet, and the fiery passion of the Greek dramatist. But all these elements are blended in such an artistic way that the unity of the play is not in the least impaired.

In the first act Pyrrhus sees Andromaque coming toward him and asks her in the most natural manner if she is looking for him. She explains that she is going to visit her young son, her only consolation, whom she is allowed to see once a day. The king then explains to her that soon she will have another cause for sorrow as the Greeks have asked him to surrender to them the child whom they dread, as the son of their former enemy Hector. Tears and distress of the mother who replies:

> No they do not dread him
> A mere child who does not know whose son and whose captive he is.
> They were afraid that he might wipe his mother's tears.

Pyrrhus reassures her. He has already denied the request. The Greeks have threatened him, but "were they to cross the seas with their thousand ships" to demand her son, even at the cost of his life, he will protect the child; but "will she ever remain so unkind to him?"

While fighting for you, shall I ever be allowed
Not to reckon you among my enemies?

She replies: "My Lord, what are you doing", and she asks him to think of what the Greeks will say when they realize that such a generous attitude is dictated by his love for her. As for me

A captive, always sad, weary of myself,
How can you expect me to love you?

The King, who is an oriental, a despot, as well as a man in love, an evil combination, is angered at such ingratitude and decides to turn the child over to the Greeks and to marry Hermione, who in the play of Racine is merely engaged to Pyrrhus, and not his wife, as in the play of Euripides. No seventeenth century audience would have tolerated the attitude of Pyrrhus had he been married. Shortly after, Andromaque tells Pyrrhus that she will not survive her child and that "having killed the father on the battlefield and caused the death of the son, he will soon have united the whole family in the tomb". Pyrrhus then relents, pleads in his turn, and offers to marry Andromaque at the very altar which is being prepared for his wedding to Hermione. Once more she refuses, and Pyrrhus makes up his mind, once for all, to marry Hermione and give up Andromaque. Before the pressing danger of her son Andromaque decides to marry the King in order to save the life of the child, and to kill herself immediately after the wedding in order to remain true to the memory of Hector. Meanwhile Hermione has a certain Orestes, a friend from childhood, who has so far played the part of the neglected suitor. She asks him just one question: "I want to know if you love me?" to which he replies: "If I love you, O Heaven". Has he not given her all the

proofs. . . . She interrupts him, "Avenge me and I will believe everything". What is he to do? To murder the King. He is appalled. He came as an ambassador, he will have war declared, will kill Pyrrhus on the battlefield, but he cannot commit a murder. Then she insists, taunting him for his fears, like another Lady Macbeth, and worse even, because she adds: "If he does not die to-day, to-morrow I may love him". The fate of Pyrrhus is then settled and Orestes leaves to murder him at the altar where he is to marry Andromaque. Soon after, during the wedding, Hermione reappears alone on the stage a tragic figure, torn between her love and her jealousy.

Where am I? What have I done? What shall I do?
Dazed in mind, torn at heart,
Wandering without an aim, I go about the palace.
Ah if only I could know whether I love or I hate.
The cruel one! The way in which he dismissed me!
Without regret, without grief.
Have I seen him embarrassed? Did he pity me for a moment?
Silent to my sighs, indifferent to my alarms!
. . . And I should have mercy on him.
My heart, my weak heart is still pleading for him.
I tremble at the thought of the blow that threatens him!
And about to be avenged, I have already forgiven.
No, let him die; since he does not live for me.
The treacherous one is triumphant and mocks at my despair,
He thinks that it will be a matter of tears
That with one arm I will ward off the blow from the other.
Let him die since he has compelled me to command this—
To command this! What? Have I done this?
He will die through my love for him!—

and she remembers how she loved him even in the dreams of her childhood, and she is about to stop Orestes, when her confidante (the nurse of Shakespearian dramas) comes in. Hermione asks what the king is doing. Does he look uneasy, embarrassed, ashamed? Did he look toward the door to see if she was coming? "No, he is

triumphant, as proud and as happy as can be." And what was Orestes doing? "Nothing."

The coward, he trembles for his life.

And in rage and despair she is about to go and strike Pyrrhus herself when Orestes enters and tells her that her command has been obeyed, and that the deed is done. He then proceeds to tell her how it was accomplished, but she does not hear him, she merely replies:

What have they done?

He goes on, and she suddenly stops him:

Peace monster! you alone are to blame for such a cowardly murder.
Go thee, to thy Greeks, boast of thy foul deed,
I disclaim it, and I abhor thee.
Be gone! thou fell Barbarian. How could you murder him
And on such a day!
What had he done? For what reason?
Who told you to do such a thing?

Orestes appalled at such a change asks

O heaven! Have you not yourself ordered his death?

merely to be answered:

Ah! should you have believed a frantic passion?
Could you not have read deeper into my thoughts?
Did you not see that my heart belied my lips, every moment,
Should you not have asked me a hundred times
And consulted me again before striking, or rather avoided me.
We would still see him, he would still be wavering between us two.
Perhaps he would have loved me, or pretended to do so!

She then dismisses Orestes telling him that she gives up her family, her very country, since it could produce a monster like him. She rushes to the temple, kills herself on the body of Pyrrhus, and Orestes goes mad.

*Andromaque,* which is not the best and the most popular

of our classical dramas is well conducted, offers intensely tragic situations, and reveals no common power. Imagine a Lady Macbeth confessing to her husband that she was in love with one of his victims. And yet the opinion generally accredited abroad is that French classical dramatists, fettered as they were by the Aristotelian rules, and being the slaves of a court and a society incapable of understanding passion, produced only tame and insipid plays.

Some of our classical dramas were translated into English, one of them, the *Cid* of Corneille, as early as 1637, almost simultaneously with its original publication in France. Several other plays of Corneille, *Polyeucte, Horace, Pompée* were translated by people of rank and culture in England, as is well known, about the middle of the seventeenth century and they were acted in 1668 and 1669. But it was mainly at the beginning of the eighteenth century that a real effort was made to bring the French classical drama before the British public. The group of classicists, Addison and Steele, sponsored the French drama and tried to implant it in England. The *Andromaque* of Racine was translated twice and also re-adapted for the English stage. Ten other plays of Corneille and Racine were translated and six of them acted in London. *Andromaque* was on the whole fairly successful and continued to hold the stage in England, throughout the eighteenth century. Every great English or Irish actress wanted to play the part of Hermione. It was given at Covent Garden, at Drury Lane, and in Dublin where it was a tremendous success. In 1764 if we believe Baker, it was on the repertory of both theatres. It was acted in England after 1815 and even in 1820 it "continued on the active list" though in the estimation of Genest who records the fact, it was but "an indifferent tragedy".

But, despite its popularity, the play was hardly understood except by a very small elite of classicists and a certain number of eighteenth century sentimentalists. Even then the latter, like Richardson, had no few objections to offer to the play. One of the translators felt that the end of the play was not Shakespearian enough for the English taste. He therefore introduced a ghost, the ghost of Hector the husband of Andromaque, who tells her to be sensible, to do the practical thing, in a word to marry Pyrrhus, which she does.

The author of a pamphlet circulated at the time and called "A modest survey of that celebrated tragedy of *Andromaque*" deplores the barrenness of the play, "the absence of ornaments to the style, of high flown metaphors and sharp turns of wit". The conclusion of Racine's tragedy seems to him "absurd and illogical". "Why should not Andromaque marry Pyrrhus. He was a good man, in love with her and willing to do well by her son. She would have been taken care of all her life". As to her plan of marrying him and killing herself, he denounces it as "the most shameless of cheats". "She is a vaporing fool, a heartless cheat, a jilt, and he, by not protecting himself, is a fool and he gets what he deserves." Such practical considerations, as has been remarked, are the vindication of a "commercial sense of honor". They also tell us that the true spirit of the Racinian tragedy was not always appreciated in England. Again, as in so many other instances, the two conceptions of literature, one with a moral tendency, the other indifferent to moral, religious, and other considerations, came into conflict. As an artistic creation, conceived independently of any moral or practical purpose, having only in view art for art's sake, and stripped as it was of all

superficial ornaments, the French classical drama could not go very far in England.

Shakespeare fared hardly better in France. He had been introduced to the French public by a few travelers and translators of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. He was discovered again by Voltaire who, in one of his fits of enthusiasm for English things, introduced him again to the French, but in his own way: bringing him like some shaggy and unkempt giant of the North, before those aristocratic gatherings of the eighteenth century who were not afraid to discuss the boldest religious, political, or philosophical problems, but who remained none the less very fastidious in the domain of taste and art. Shakespeare soon became an object of both curiosity and repulsion. Voltaire had generously pointed out what he termed "those flashes of genius which shine on the dark night of Shakespearian plays". But some forty years later Voltaire, still finding his "protégé" in those same Parisian circles to which he had introduced him and in a new French garb (the famous translation of Letourneur) which bid fair to make him a success, realized that his own supremacy as a dramatist was endangered. He therefore set upon the intruder. Shakespeare became at his merciless hands, "a monster, a clown, a showman". Severely handled by Voltaire, Shakespeare was treated even worse by such translators as Ducis who rewrote his plays and tried to adapt them to the French taste, and above all by the stage managers who between 1800 and 1817 used his plays for popular melodramatic entertainments. French critics in the beginning of the nineteenth century refused to countenance any comparison between Racine and Shakespeare. A well-known traveler of this period, Fiévée, having seen Shakespeare's plays acted in England, declared that the characters

in those plays were only "mad men and crazy women". Chateaubriand himself asserted that the Shakespearian drama was a dangerous example for any literature. La Harpe, the famous classical critic of the time, would have deemed it a blasphemy to admit that the British dramatist could in the least approach Racine.

Things had reached this stage when, in 1816, an English, or rather an Irish woman, Lady Morgan, well-known as the author of tales and novels of Irish life, came to Paris. As an aristocrat she had access to the aristocratic salons of the Boulevard Saint-Germain, as a liberal she won the heart of La Fayette and other liberals; as an anti-royalist she became the confidant of the Bonapartists. She spent some time in France, where she was very popular, and, in 1817, wrote a book which made a great sensation in France and in England. Lady Morgan, among other things, tried to present the French drama to her fellow countrymen. She had been irritated at the way in which Racine was eulogized in literary circles in Paris. She had seen his plays acted and had not appreciated them. Moreover, Racine had committed two crimes: he had lived under the despotic government of Louis XIV, and he had followed the Aristotelian rules. Now Lady Morgan was Irish, essentially Irish, and as such "agin the government" and against the rules. She therefore took Racine to task and loudly proclaimed his inferiority to Shakespeare.

In the first place, genius will not thrive in a land of servitude; then no real genius would suffer the limitations imposed by the antiquated Aristotelian rules. "True loftiness of conception and a bold range of imagination are utterly incompatible with the double despotism of Aristotle and the political system under which French authors wrote." To crown all, Racine was not even a poet, and much less

a thinker. "Her mind, filled with a hundred splendid poetical images of Shakespeare and Dryden, she asked the passionate admirers of Racine to produce anything that could compare with those effusions of bold and high-wrought imagination, the brilliant metaphor, the fanciful simile, the sublime allusion." She asked "for some of those philosophical reflections which teem in every page of Shakespeare . . . but Racine was a historian, not a philosopher" and she kept wondering why "the tragedies of Racine without one poetical image, without one philosophical observation, without any originality of character are preferred by the most literary nation in Europe". Racine's plays, in spite of his smooth and elegant versification, seemed to her "flat, cold, insufficient to warm the imagination, interest the judgment and rouse the feelings which have received their tone of exaltation from the passionate, energetic, splendid dramas of the English bard,—irregular, wild as the works of nature, but like them fresh, sublime, vigorous and beyond the reach of art".

Lady Morgan knew little about literary criticism, her great discoveries had already been anticipated by Dryden, Shaftesbury and other English critics, but she presented her ideas in such a simple and yet vivid manner that she popularized what had been more or less in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries a school controversy. On the other hand, her self-assurance and her pugnacious tone called for answers. Her book was published in Paris shortly after it appeared in England. The first translator, Defeauconpret, the well-known translator of Scott, happened to be a classicist and a royalist. His indignation was such that we find him constantly toning down the text of Lady Morgan, making suppressions, and appending footnotes of his own to the translation. Several protests appeared, one published

in London, chiefly for political motives, two in Paris, one by Defeauconpret and the other by a distinguished scholar, Dupin, who went as far as Dublin to see Lady Morgan and discuss the matter with her. Practically every great French and English review took part in the new controversy which raged till 1823 when the first of a famous series of pamphlets, entitled Racine-Shakespeare, was published by a celebrated art and literary critic, Stendhal. Stendhal, who had always disliked Racine, partly because his parents and relatives kept praising him, and always liked Shakespeare, entered the lists of the British dramatist in 1817, and in 1823 boldly undertook to hale the classicists to the pillory once for all. He almost succeeded. At all events the French classical drama lost a great deal of its prestige even in France.

The triumph of the Romanticists was complete, in theory but not in practice. The Classicists were defeated, the barriers between the two literatures were rapidly crumbling, and Shakespeare, Byron, and Scott were becoming more and more popular in France every day. The enthusiasm of the new generation of writers was intense, all they needed was models and in the case of the drama, new plays which might hold the stage.

A first attempt had already been made, in 1822, by a certain Penley, the manager of a traveling English company, to bring English plays before the French public. On the 31st of July a huge poster at the door of the Porte Saint Martin announced that "By His Majesty's most humble servants will be performed *Othello* by the most celebrated Shakespeare." Penley and his company came too soon, and at a particularly ill-chosen moment. On the occasion of their first performance, the theatre was crowded, the audience was very restless, the interruptions were such that the actors

jumped from the third act to the fifth, and when the scene of the murdering of Desdemona was reached, the indignation of the public could no longer be controlled and the stage was stormed by the most unruly members of the audience. Sheridan's *School for Scandal* met the same fate the next day. The play had to be withdrawn in the course of the presentation and the manager apologized for importing foreign plays.

And yet it was a foreign drama, the Shakespearian drama, which was in the end to initiate the French public to a new and powerful, though non-classical, conception of the drama. In 1826, Abbott, the manager of another English company, applied for an authorization to give English plays in Paris. After long negotiations, the company opened its season in Paris, in September, 1827. The protests from the belated defenders of Classicism were few. The attitude of French critics, very much like that of English critics in 1828 and 1829, when French plays were given in London, was one of caution. In the articles which announced the English plays one notices a very distinct desire to see these plays, and to compare them with the French ones, the general impression being that "This is a good occasion for study and comparison". Among the actors appearing in turn before these Parisian audiences were some of the best interpreters of Shakespeare, such as Kemble, Macready and Kean. Among the plays given were *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Richard the Third,* and *The Merchant of Venice.* The English actors were to leave in December, 1827; they stayed on till June, 1828, and some of them were still in France in 1829, when they played in the provinces. For the first time the French audiences were offered the real Shakespeare. Instead of the translations and imitations of tame French interpreters,

the French public was at last allowed to see Shakespeare himself in what had been considered "his coarse, barbaric plays", "his monstrous dramas", and these were given by players who were incapable of curbing their acting to suit the fastidious French taste. In spite of occasional protests, of discussions which testify to the remarkable attention and interest with which these plays were followed, Shakespeare was, on the whole, winning his way to the heart of the French—rapidly, in a flash in some cases, slowly in many others, and not without a certain resistance, but persistently. So that when, in 1829, the French romantic drama became a possibility, the ground had been cleared and the public was ready for the plays of Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo. Without overlooking or minimizing the French public's desire for novelty, its dislike for the rules, and the part played by other writers, chiefly German and Italian, it cannot be denied that it was largely through the discussion of Shakespeare's plays, and through the example of his dramas that the "fairy land of fancy where genius may wander wild", and where passion knows no limits and will abide no fetters, was revealed to our French Romantic dramatists.